



Meal Planning: How to Pack a Healthy School Lunch

Packing the kids' lunches for school means you know which nutritious foods they are eating. Here are some budget-friendly, creative ideas to keep kids happy and healthy at lunchtime:

Make a Smarter Sandwich

- While some kids prefer the same thing every day, others may be OK with a slight switch to their sandwich. Use different breads like 100% whole-wheat tortilla wraps (choose wraps low in saturated fat and made with no hydrogenated oils) or 100% whole-wheat pita pockets.
- In addition to lettuce and tomato, try shredded carrot or zucchini and sliced apple or pear with a turkey sandwich.
- Try avocado or hummus as a swap for cheese or mayo.
- Try a leftover grilled chicken in your sandwich as a switch for lunch meat.

Love those Leftovers

Think about using the leftovers from a family favorite dinner for a next day lunch. Use a thermos to keep foods hot or cold until the lunch bell rings. Some ideas:

- Soup - tomato, vegetable or bean
- Chili (vegetarian or made with lean or extra lean ground chicken)
- Spaghetti (whole wheat with tomato, pesto or marinara sauce)
- Bean casserole or beans & rice

These foods sometimes have a lot of sodium, so make them homemade with little or no salt, or compare nutrition facts of similar products and choose the ones with less sodium.

Let Them Dunk

Sometimes it's OK to let your kids play with their food, especially when they are getting extra nutrition. Try packing one of these fun dunks with dippers:

- Apple and pear slices to dip into low-fat plain yogurt or peanut butter.
- Carrot, celery and sweet pepper strips to dip into hummus, fresh salsa or homemade bean dip.
- Whole-grain crackers* or slices of grilled tofu (a soybean product) to dunk into soup.

**Choose crackers low in sodium and saturated fat and made without hydrogenated oils.*

Get Them Involved

When kids help pack their lunch, they're more likely to eat that lunch! On nights you have a bit more time, like a Sunday night, have them choose which piece of fruit or what type of whole grain bread they want and let them assemble their lunch. Make this a weekly routine – it's another great way to spend family time together.

Source: American Heart Association <http://www.heart.org>

www.commonhealth.virginia.gov

The contents of the CommonHealth weekly emails may be reprinted from an outside resource in the area of health, safety, and wellness and is intended to provide one or more views on a topic. These views do not necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth of Virginia, CommonHealth, or any particular agency and are offered for educational purposes. If you have questions or concerns about this article, please email us at wellness@dhrm.virginia.gov